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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI PRESIDENT TALABANI DISCUSSES STATE OF IRAQ
WITH CONGRESSMAN SHAYS

Classified By: Ambassador Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a December 3 meeting with the Ambassador and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, Congressman Christopher Shays stressed the importance for the U.S. public of seeing progress in Iraq relatively soon. Talabani emphasized the importance of training and equipping Iraqi Forces and said PM Maliki is optimistic about this after his Amman meeting with President Bush. Talabani explained that Iraq is better off now than it was before Operation Iraqi Freedom, but Iraq needs U.S. help to progress. President Talabani briefed Shays about the creation of a moderate Iraqi political front designed to marginalize extremists, and predicted it would help ease sectarian tension. END SUMMARY.

The Importance of Showing Progress

¶2. (C) Congressman Shays stressed to President Talabani the importance of showing the American public progress on governance and security in Iraq relatively soon. Talabani agreed, saying that GOI leaders plan to discuss Baghdad security and the possibility of bringing in other forces. Shays said replacing U.S. troops with Iraqis would be a step forward. Talabani said that U.S. troops in the cities should be replaced by Iraqi troops, with U.S. forces withdrawing to bases to be called on when they are needed. Shays told Talabani he prefers a timeline for troop transfer. Talabani explained to Shays that lack of resources inhibits the GOI's ability to meet their goals.

¶3. (C) Talabani said the U.S. can help Iraq achieve this goal with funding for weapons and with additional training. He added that Prime Minister Maliki expressed optimism after his visit with President Bush in Amman that the U.S. would give more support to the Iraqi Army. Shays asked Talabani why the GOI turned down Turkish offers to train Iraqi police. Talabani said he is not against it in principle if the Turks cover the costs. Talabani explained that training outside Iraq is costly and does not make economic sense when camps such as the one in Sulaymaniyah governorate where U.S. troops train Iraqi forces are available. Shays said that Turkey agreed to cover all training costs; the Ambassador said he would look into this. (Note: In a meeting later on December 3 with the Ambassador, outgoing Turkish Ambassador Cevikoz confirmed Turkey would pay all expenses. End note.)

Iraq Better Off, Moderate Front Will Ease Tensions

¶4. (C) Congressman Shays said his constituents do not differentiate between the Saddam era and the sectarian violence and torture in Iraq today. Talabani said this

reflected a misunderstanding of the positive side of freeing Iraq from Saddam's rule: Iraqis have gained rights, held legitimate elections, and created their own constitution. The Kurdish Region and some southern governorates are better than under Saddam. The national budget has doubled from last year's budget and the new moderate front should help ease the sectarian violence. Talabani called on the U.S. to press Arab countries to better support Iraq. He speculated that some Arab countries fear the success of democracy in Iraq. However, he said regional engagement requires a careful approach. He stressed that Iraq should work out its internal affairs and then it can talk to its neighbors from a position of strength.

15. (C) Shays urged stepped-up reconciliation efforts. Talabani agreed but said the Saddam regime has left Iraq with a weak base on which to build. Talabani told Shays that members of a modified Political Council on National Security (PCNS) had formed a committee to draft an agreement on a non-sectarian national front that would work to isolate extremist forces. Talabani said if the U.S. pulls out now, Iraq would cease to exist; he hoped within the next month the moderate front would be functional and tensions between Sunni and Shia would begin to ease.

16. (C) Talabani told Congressman Shays that PCNS participants also discussed the need for a "kitchen cabinet" within the Iraqi Government to make decisions, the need for a Council of Ministers shake-up, the need for better coordination between the Presidency Council and the Prime Minister, and the need for reformulation of the government's program so that Sunnis can no longer complain that they are not real partners. Khalilzad